

Doug Murphy
[Ahwatukee Foothills News](#)

When a congressman drops in, there is only one thing to talk about nowadays ... health care reform, which is exactly what staff at the *Ahwatukee Foothills News* started with when Rep. Harry Mitchell (D-Arizona) visited the offices of the *Ahwatukee Foothills News* last week.

"It's really been very positive," Mitchell said of the response he's been getting.

But he also conceded that there are many misconceptions about what was in the final bill and plenty of angry people that he has come across over the past few weeks while on break from Washington and back in Arizona.

He said the final bill had more than 200 amendments, making it hard for anyone to stay up to date on each element of the final bill.

"I became a student again," said the 69-year-old Mitchell, a former Tempe high school teacher who read the bill, the amendments, as well as briefing papers on what each amendment would do.

And as with any major bill with many parts, Mitchell said he understands there will be some unintended consequences, but that there is time to make corrections, since many of the provisions don't kick in for several years.

For many opponents, the opposition comes less from the details in the final bill and more about how the bill was passed.

"I have to agree, the process wasn't the best," Mitchell said, but he stands by the final results.

"I've got five grandkids," one of whom has asthma, Mitchell said. "He'll be able to get insurance for the rest of his life," adding that his grandson can't be denied because of a preexisting condition.

One misconception that Mitchell has run into includes how it will hurt Medicare recipients. It won't, said the congressman who is a Medicare recipient. In addition, illegal immigrants are not covered contrary to what some opponents of the law have said, according to Mitchell.

As far as veterans and those with Tri-Care, Mitchell said he contemplated voting against the Senate's version because it had so many special provisions and special deals for some states, but that he finally voted yes after being assured that those elements would be stripped out in the reconciliation process, which they were.

While many political insiders feel that the November election could turn on health care, Mitchell guesses that the issues important to people will change between now and then.

If voters want to talk about health care he will, although Mitchell said he would rather talk about the economy and jobs.

"Everyone knows someone whose been affected by the economy," Mitchell said, adding that his office has focused on small business development. While some of the numbers are starting to indicate an economic turnaround, "For many small businesses and those unemployed it's going to stay about the same. It's going to be tough," he said.

Republicans are mounting a full-court press against Mitchell, who is a former mayor of Tempe and state senator, feeling he is vulnerable because of his vote for health care.

But first Republicans have to narrow their own six candidate field in the August primary election. Candidates include former county treasurer David Schweikert, who won the primary two years ago but lost to Mitchell in the general election; Susan Bitter-Smith, who narrowly lost to Schweikert in the GOP primary in 2008; Dr. Chris Salvino, advertising executive Jim Ward, who leads the way in fundraising, according to the Federal Elections Commission; Mark Spinks

and Lee Gentry.